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Washington looks at 'contra' unity

Issue troubles lawmakers arguing Reagan's aid request

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Washington

Can the "contras" reform themselves?

This is a key issue confronting lawmakers as Congress picks up the issue of United States help for the Nicaraguan rebels and President Reagan, also back from vacation, lobbies hard for his \$100 million aid package.

There is concern in the House, as there was in the Senate, that the contra opposition groups are disunited, that the military forces will not take orders from the main political arm, and that in general the contras have no political program that defines their objectives and can appeal to the Nicaraguan people.

"A lot of people in the House are concerned that neither Nicaraguans nor Americans can identify with the contras because they don't know their objectives or their philosophy," a Democratic congressional aide says. "Also, a united front would be more effective, because if the contras ever reached their goal of taking over the country [without achieving unity], you'd have a Lebanon-type situation."

[Congress faces contra aid, budget deadlines. Story, Page 3.]

Members of the House begin their reconsideration of the issue amid reports that the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), the chief US-backed Nicaraguan rebel group, is in the throes of an unpublicized reorganization. According to an Associated Press report Monday, Leonardo Somarriba, a US-educated businessman, was named UNO's secretary general last month and is planning to overhaul the organization.

Mr. Somarriba, who runs a printing company in Miami, describes his role as "chief executive officer," according to the AP, and says that he seeks to establish a structure so three members of UNO's directorate can work together. The three best-known directors, who visited with President Reagan recently, are Adolfo Calero (who heads the Nicaraguan Democratic Force or FDN, the main rebel army) and Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, two former officials in the Sandinista government.

Edgar Chamorro, a former FDN leader, says that Mr. Somarriba represents a more moderate influence and that the contra military are not happy with his appoint-

ment. He also says Mr. Somarriba has long had close links with the Central Intelligence Agency.

"This means that the CIA is taking more control of UNO," said Mr. Chamorro in a telephone interview. Mr. Chamorro, who resigned last year because of contra ties to the former Somoza regime, opposes any US military support for the rebels.

Disarray in UNO and lack of coordination among various rebel groups have generated congressional pressures for reform. On the eve of the aid vote, Senators Nancy Landon Kassebaum (R) of Kansas, William S. Cohen (R) of Maine, and Sam Nunn (D) of Georgia sought assurances that the President would press for human rights reforms and unity among the contra groups.

The Senate measure passed only after the administration included a provision barring aid after July 1 unless the President reported that the contras "have agreed to and are beginning to implement" reforms aimed at: broadening their political base; coordinating all rebel efforts; eliminating human rights abuses; working toward representative democracy; and subordinating the rebel military forces to civilian leadership.

Some Central America experts say that restructuring the external opposition groups, uniting them, and coming up with a democratic program is crucial to establishing a sustainable and bipartisan US policy. "The key question is the character of the movement opposing the Sandinistas," says Robert Leiken, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Mr. Leiken believes that popular opposition to the Sandinistas is growing. But, he observes, to take advantage of this the US must get behind a broad internal and external united front against the regime that would include all groups. It must also press for reforms within UNO. Only a broad unity movement, he says, will force the Sandinistas to hold elections or to negotiate.

One major concern of Democrats in the House is the extent to which the FDN high command still is dominated by former national guardsmen in the Somoza regime. Rep. George Miller (D) of California and Rep. Matthew McHugh (D) of New York released a report to a congressional caucus last month concluding that 12 of the top 13 leaders of the FDN high command are former guardsmen.

Nine of the 13 names are confirmed by the administration, say the two Democrats.